

Grazing Lands Conservation



photo: Chris Coulton

Cattle graze on this farm in Leelanau County, Michigan. A portable watering system allows for easy access to water in a rotational grazing system.

Grazing land conservation is a voluntary effort to enhance Michigan's privately owned grazing lands by increasing technical assistance, research, and education to landowners at the grassroots level. Approximately 30 percent of the state's agricultural economy is forage based.

There are two programs aimed at private grazing land conservation, the Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI) and the Conservation of Private Grazing Land provision in the 1996 Farm Bill.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) supports and provides funds for grazing land conservation to carry out demonstration projects and educational programs, as well as providing grassland and forage management technical assistance to landowners in every county of Michigan.

Importance of Forage in Michigan:

- Michigan has over 2.9 million acres of forage.
- Michigan is 31st in the nation in total number of cattle and increasing.
- Michigan is 16th in the nation in hay production.

Grazing lands provide food for livestock and forage provides erosion control, improves water quality, and sequesters carbon from the atmosphere. Wildlife habitat and enhanced scenic beauty are additional benefits of grazing lands.

The NRCS in Michigan employs a state grassland/forage specialist who is totally dedicated to grazing lands conservation. In addition, seven NRCS employees have at least 20 percent of their time devoted to grazing land conservation. Michigan NRCS staff in 57 field offices across the state also provide technical assistance in support of grazing lands conservation.

During fiscal year 2001, Michigan grassland/forage specialists and staff helped producers plan 10,000 acres of prescribed grazing and apply 10,500 acres of prescribed grazing. Michigan NRCS helped coordinate 12 demonstration projects involving 300 cooperators and assisted Michigan State University Extension and local conservation districts in holding 6 forage training sessions attended by 250 producers and 30 partnering agency employees.

photo: USDA



The GLCI is a coordinated partnership of Michigan's major producer groups. The associate partners are made up of agencies, councils, and other groups to provide training and support the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative.

- Michigan Department of Agriculture
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division
- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Michigan's national representative to the National GLCI Committee
- Michigan State University Extension
- Michigan State University Agricultural Experiment Station
- Michigan United Conservation Club

- Michigan Hay and Grazing Council
- Michigan Farmers Union
- Michigan Farm Bureau
- Michigan Cattlemen's Association
- Michigan Association of Conservation Districts
- Michigan Agriculture Stewardship Association
- Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems
- Michigan Sheep Breeders Association
- Michigan Organic Food and Farming Association
- Michigan Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils

Proper management of Michigan's grasslands and forages is even more important with the abundance of Michigan's water resources. It has been said that whenever you are in Michigan you are no farther than 100 miles or less from a Great Lake and no farther than 1 mile or less from a stream flowing to one of the Great Lakes. Since the Great Lakes make up 20 percent of the earth's fresh water supply and 95 percent of the United States fresh water supply, it is very important for Michigan to manage its grasslands, forages and livestock to protect this precious resource. The Michigan Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Partnership works diligently towards this cause.



photo: Chris Coulon

Range-fed Chickens are rotated on this sustainable agriculture system in Allegan County, Michigan. The egg-mobile can be moved from one field to another.

